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ABSTRACT

This study explored how the governance leadership of Ohio's urban school districts views and deals with major governance issues related to student achievement. Five sets of issues were chosen as the focus of the research: (1) the recruitment, selection, retention, and evaluation of Ohio urban superintendents of schools and school district treasurers; (2) recruitment, selection, assignment, and evaluation of teachers, principals, and other professionals in urban systems; (3) school board effectiveness; (4) escalating competition for planning time and resources as it drains district capacities for governing and managing urban districts; and (5) technology, e-government, and institutional oversight. Researchers conducted a set of focus groups in three areas of the state, additional focus groups of administrators, and a conference on governance and student achievement attended by representatives of nine urban school districts. Findings from these focus groups and conferences are grouped according to the set of issues. Representatives of the urban districts that examined these issues found that they had much in common, and they expressed the belief that they would benefit from united, or at least mutually supporting, actions. Findings show that it is difficult to focus on the governance of learning projects when so many other factors, many of them easier to discuss, are believed to contribute to learning. Governance in urban education is becoming more, rather than less, difficult, and deserves greater attention that it usually receives. An appendix lists the issues in each set discussed. (Contains 16 references.) (SLD)

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Governing Learning in Ohio's Urban School Districts: An Exploration of Five Sets of Governance Issues That Appear Related to Student Achievement

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Governing Learning in Ohio's Urban School Districts: An Exploration of Five Sets of Governance Issues That Appear Related to Student Achievement

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how the governance leadership of Ohio's urban school districts view and deal with major governance issues that appear related to student achievement.

Review of selected literature

Defining governance is not a new exercise. Definitions and governance activities included below have been selected primarily from recent governance of education literature. Interests in governance, including arriving at definitions, are found in several disciplines across the ages. Law, political science, policy science, history are examples.

Carver has defined governance as, "the process by which a small group of people, usually on behalf of others, exercises authority over an organization" (2000, p. 26). Incorporating that concept even in the act of defining limitations on the authority of the few by extending authority to the members of the group, Golarz and Golarz define "participatory governance" as "the transfer of authority and responsibility from those who hold power by virtue of law, contract, or organizational role to those not so empowered" (1995, p. 4). Incorporating both those definitions is Bauman, "Formally, governance is the exercise of public authority to achieve common goals as determined by a democratic majority" (1996, p. 19). For schools, the common goal of governance should be improving student achievement (Bolton, 2000, p. 9)

Boards have many governance duties but hiring the district's superintendent is the most important duty (Cox & Malone, 2001, p. 2). The key to quality education, to student achievement, is the quality of the school board's and superintendent's teamwork and leadership (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000, pp. iv, 1). Superintendents typically are expected to be change

agents, developers of the changed situation left by change agents, or maintainers of the status quo (Glass, 1992, p. 30). The multiple role options facing the superintendent add to the complexity of the governance situation. Ambiguity also results from the different conceptions each participant has of his or her role or area of responsibility as well as from the instability resulting from the rapid turnover of board members. These are some of the major causes for problems in attracting and retaining superintendents (Vail, 2001, pp. 1-2).

A related problem is that of attracting and retaining other professionals, especially administrators. Cox concluded that school districts are not identifying, developing, and then employing their own administrators (2001, p. 8). Once in an administrative role, those employed in the district hierarchy are likely to find that barriers between the various levels of the hierarchy are as strong as those between the hierarchy and the community (Sarason, 1995, p. 7). This is not an attractive job situation.

According to Carver, school boards are the weakest link in the educational system. He views them as the least disciplined and the least rational participants, compared to administrators and teachers, in the governance of school districts (2000, p. 6). Even when the desire to work together exists among all governance participants, those who equate power with control turn boardrooms into battlegrounds. However, once there is a realization that power can be maintained while working with others, the governance participants realize they have more power as a group than as individuals (Vail, 2001, p. 3).

Governance works through policy statements that are essentially public decisions (Bauman, p. 21). That is the decisions are made in the "sunshine" of public meetings by representatives of the citizens of the community, and the documentation of those decisions are, or ought to be, available to all members of the community. In both public debate and the public

record electronic technology can affect the governance of school districts... Love notes that e-governance (use of electronic communications within the governance functions of a district) usually follows a three-stage development: (a) information provision and email, (b) selected interactive transactions enabled, and (c) integrated service delivery across multiple levels and jurisdictions (2001, p. 439). E-governance has the capacity to increase the public's access both to the negotiations or debate about public policy and to the documents related to the debate. The public can be invited in to a negotiation that is inherently public. Also, the public can inform better itself by accessing the public records underlying or related to the debate as well as the policy documents that are the result of the negotiations

The link between school governance and student achievement is, at best, assumed to be important. The research in this area, however, is very thin. One study that attempted to connect school boards with student achievement, found that there were differences in knowledge and belief between school boards of high achieving districts and those of low achieving districts. (Rice & et al., 2001, pp. 6, 14). The districts is this study were essentially rural and small town districts that ranged in size from 1,395 to 5,163 students and were selected as comparable to typical districts in the State of Iowa. (Rice, et al., 2001, pp. 5-6, 27).

In actual practice, however, the link between governance and student achievement might be subverted by other interests. Taken altogether, "Urban school governance is … an adult game, in which the schooling enterprise is tied to many agendas besides the teaching and learning of children in classrooms, although each group often claims to be working only toward this latter goal" (Cibulka, 1997, p. 235).

Definitions Used in This Work

As the paragraphs above indicate, there are many definitions and of and dimensions to governance in the literature. Cibulka has caught the essence of the definitional dilemma in the quotation just above when he says that urban school governance is an adult game. At the University of Akron, the focus has been shifted to its effect on student learning

There are few if any references to the "governing of learning" as an object of interest or study over the years. From at least as long ago as the 1917 Cleveland School Survey (Ayres) up to and including the present there appears to have been an unstated understandings that if attention were directed to such things as personnel, funding, facilities, materials of instruction, instruction itself, and assessment that learning would follow. What has been missing is an understanding of how all of this comes about; how the governance function can effect and does affect student learning.The requirements of learners—those who acquire knowledge– must be the primary object of both emotional and fiscal investment in urban systems. Governing then takes center stage. It is the aggregate of activity that contributes to the learner's acquisition of content. Instruction is implied; it is supplementary; it is not center stage; it is a strategic goal but not the primary target of public investment. These sentences are simplistic and profound simultaneously and therein lies their value.

Methodology

Interest in governance at The University of Akron has been developing in recent years through the Center for Urban and Higher Education Studies. Fueled by an emerging national interest in governance, the center seized an opportunity to explore governance issues that appear to be related to student performance. While the issues are of importance to all communities, we have chosen to focus on urban school districts because of the large number of learners whose

achievement is in jeopardy and on Ohio as a matter of convenience and interest since the researchers live and work in that state.

In exploration with a group of graduate students in the 2000-2001 school year six sets of issues were identified and summarized. Of these, five were chosen as the focus of this research effort:

- Issue Set I: the recruitment, selection, retention, and evaluation of Ohio urban superintendents of schools and school district treasurers.
- Issue Set II: recruitment, selection, assignment, and evaluation of teachers, principals, and other professionals in urban systems.
- Issue Set III: school board effectiveness.
- Issue Set IV: escalating competition for planning time and resources is draining district capacities for governing and managing urban districts
- Issue Set V: technology, e-government, and institutional oversight.

The researchers sought to engage urban district leaders in discussions about these governance issues in several ways. First, during the 2001-2002 school year, the researchers conducted focus groups in the three major urban areas of the state. Participation was limited to one person per district and to current or recent board members, superintendents, and district treasurers from state defined urban districts or other nearby districts that were experiencing similar problems. The focus group questions were designed to concentrate discussions on the five governance issue sets and the spheres of governance influence of superintendents, board members, and treasurers in their districts.

Second, executives from the Ohio School Boards Association and the Buckeye Association of School Administrators were involved in arranging focus groups and conference

planning. A small advisory committee of graduates from The University of Akron was also helpful in shaping the governance work.

Third, the researchers, with support from the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, sponsored a conference on governance and student achievement in Ohio's urban school districts. Each of the 21 urban districts in Ohio was invited to send three representatives to the summer conference. Additionally, those who participated in the focus groups were invited to participate in the conference. In preparation for the conference, a group of writers, one or two for each issue group, met regularly to discuss the topics, consider the focus groups comments, write. and critically review drafts of conference papers.

Representatives from nine of the twenty-one urban districts in Ohio were in attendance at the conference. In the mix were seven active superintendents and six who had been superintendents in the past. Six of the active superintendents were from the urban districts, one from a first ring suburban district with many characteristics of an urban district and one superintendent of an educational service center in a county that is heavily urbanized. There were seven board members, seven treasurers in attendance., and two central office administrators participating in the conference. From the universities there were seven people, professors and researchers, from five different universities in the State. Some of those attending fit in several categories, such as university professor and board member or past superintendent and university professor.

At the conference, brief presentations were made of the papers to set the stage for extended small group conversations about each set of issues. A set of discussion questions, prepared by the writers as they met to prepare for the conference, were mailed to the participants prior to the conference and provided again in the conference materials at registration (see

Appendix A). Several presenters ended their presentations with one or two additional questions. After each presentation, the conference participants were assigned to groups of 5 or 6 people. Efforts were made to continually change the mix of participants in each small group for the five small group sessions. A university professor, with directions to focus interaction around one or two preferred questions,, facilitated each small group. The facilitators ensured that all in the group had opportunities to speak on each topic, and they captured their group's comments on flip chart paper for saving and display to the rest of the participants.

A Kiva exercise closed the conference on the second morning. The Kiva, a multi-level, facilitated discussion, captured the ideas, concepts, and proposals for follow-up considered significant by the participants. For this conference, there were three rings of participants; each ring taking its turn in the center as discussants, with the other two rings observing. The treasurers were the first ring to be discussants, followed by board members, and then superintendents and other central office administrators. After the third ring concluded its facilitated discussion, the facilitator solicited comments from the entire audience related to the various discussion rings. It must be noted that the questions used to prompt comments and participation in the Kivas were different for each group although common themes, such as professional development, ran throughout the exercise. Additionally, these prompts did not coincide with the five issue sets used in the pre-conference focus groups and the small group interactions during the conference.

Findings

The findings for each of the five major issue sets that were the focus of the conference are presented here in three sub-heading, each identified by the venue in which they were captured (focus groups, small group discussions, and Kiva). Since many of the comments made during the Kiva exercises did not fit into the categories of the issue sets, there are fewer findings from that

venue listed here. Those Kiva based findings that are presented, are identified by the group from which they came. A few of the findings are listed more than once in situations where they were appropriate for more than one issue set.

Issue Set I: Superintendents and Treasurers

Focus groups.

There were three ideas clearly expressed in the focus groups related to the recruiting, selection, and retention of superintendents and treasurers. One, participants suggested that the board's belief system affects not only the ability to recruit and retain superintendents but also the effectiveness of the district in improving student performance. The focus group members tended to agree that the governance culture or climate of the district was itself, in some way, directly responsible not only for the ability of the district to attract and retain quality leadership but also for the ability of the district to bring about improvement in student achievement.

A second idea expressed was that longevity of the governance team members in their roles (board members, superintendent, treasurer) affects the ability of the team to improve student achievement—the longer they are working together the better their chances to improve student achievement. The third idea was more of an acknowledgement that the expectations of the treasurer are changing and increasing.

Small groups.

Based on the questions the participants chose to respond to there were two themes common across the six groups: addressing student achievement and the board, superintendent, and treasurer relationship. In regards to student achievement, these urban participants believed that they faced more challenges related to student learning than governance actors in other types of districts. They descried the fact that currently the Ohio Proficiency Tests are the only

important measure of student achievement, privileged over other, equally important measures. Whatever those measures might be, the participants felt that the governance of the district should be clearly focused on student achievement. Because of the extremely challenging urban environment, they believed that the urban districts needed leaders and staff members who had proven their competence prior to taking positions in the urban districts.

With regard to board, superintendent, and treasurer relationships, the conferees expressed the belief that Board development/training is needed in (a) selecting a superintendent and/or treasurer, (b) firming up goals and expectations of the superintendent and/or treasurer, and (c) acquiring and performing behaviors or actions that sustain and enable the superintendent and/or the treasurer to do their work. They held that the board—superintendent—treasurer relationship should be viewed as a partnership, a reciprocal arrangement. To bring this about they saw the need to identify goals clearly and agree upon them, clearly to delineate the roles of board members, superintendent, and treasurer, and to establish evaluation criteria at hiring.

Kiva

In the Kiva, the treasurers acknowledged that they sometimes feel alone but recognize that others in the district are struggling with the same issues. They believe that "we (all stakeholders) are in this (educational enterprise) together" and that everyone has something to contribute. One contribution they see themselves as making is to seek out best practices and leadership skills from areas outside of education and bring them back to the organization.

Board members saw the need to continually restart board in-service education because the board continually changes. Untrained board members can be a stumbling block to a district. Trained members can help superintendent and district.

Issue Set II: Teachers, Principals, and Other Professionals

Focus Groups

The participants placed a greater emphasis on professional development for teachers than for administrators, and for administrators than for superintendents. They also noted that attracting and retaining teachers and administrators in urban districts is made difficult by the salary levels and the state of the facilities.

Small Groups

The participants voiced beliefs that urban schools are far different than rural and exurban schools, so much so that the preparation of professionals to serve in these districts ought to require some special attention.

They also expressed a need to recognize and balance the different needs and capabilities of the school level and the district level versus each other. For example, the district has a need for a common curriculum throughout the district and each building (and, indeed, each teacher) has a need to adapt the curriculum to fit the needs of student in attendance at that building. Each level needs to recognize and respect the particular capabilities of the other level.

The participants made these points about the recruitment, selection, and hiring processes: (a) take the time to hire well, (b) seek evidence of quality teaching skills and dispositions (team player and positive attitude about children/students), and (c) view the hiring process as one in which both the district and the professional ought to be making a well-informed choice.

With a goal of retaining teachers, the participants said it was important to "value" teachers. They felt there should be differentiated pay for teaching in urban districts and in the more difficult teaching situations inside urban districts and there should be a connection between

student achievement and teacher pay. Finally, they saw the non-renewal of poor teachers as a way to support quality teachers.

Kiva

In the Kiva treasurers saw a need to focus on improving relationships and staff morale and suggested the involvement of others in decisions about spending and/or reducing funds as one step toward accomplishing that. Superintendents were more direct in seeking to involve or train all staff, not just teachers, with a focus on student improvement.

Issue Set III: Board Effectiveness

Focus Groups

Those engaged in the focus group conversations, an effective board is characterized by efforts to educate or improve all members. Becoming an effective board member takes time and effort at development. Another characteristic of an effective board is that there is trust and respect even in the midst of disagreement both among board members and between the board and the superintendent. Participants focused on criteria that seemed related to the interaction of the participants.

Small Groups

While the small groups did deal with the trust relationship, more emphasis was given to board policies and the way the board works as providing the framework for student achievement. There was a common focus on the relationship between board policies and student achievement.

In talking about trust, members of the small groups believed it essential to effective relationships between board and superintendent and staff. The groups identified three ways that the trust is expressed: (a) quick, public support of superintendent when controversy arises, (b) the

goals put forth by all parties are shared goals, and (c) the board carries messages to and from the community, that is, the communication is not one way.

The discussions on trust included parallel discussions of fears that are inherent in governance relationships. Most were not specifically fears of board members or superintendents; they seemed common to all roles in the governance structure. The first mentioned fear was that of being wrong, followed by loss of integrity, loss of respect, and fear of not being supported in rough times. Additionally, board members feared being perceived as rubber stamps for the administration.

Kiva

During the Kiva exercise, the comments made by treasurers related to board effectiveness extended beyond the immediacy of the district. Treasurers emphasized that member schools in the urban 21 faced the same challenges, and each school board had knowledge to share with the others. For instance, a school board might discover at least temporary answers to parts of the urban challenge. Working together to solve the puzzle of urban education, board members in collaborating school districts could contribute new learnings to the collective understanding of what urban school board effectiveness requires.

Board members in their Kiva conversation expanded some on the ideas put forth by the treasurers. They noted that as board members working in a single district, they get the impression that they are doing something wrong. However, interacting with leaders from other urban districts, they get the sense that the whole urban education situation is a big, shared issue. There are so many things to address, especially in trying to fix what are essentially social needs. The boards also talked about the constraints imposed by untrained board members on school district operations and the necessity for ongoing in-service education due to changing board

membership. Again, board members reiterated that these challenges can be minimized by collaborative efforts among the urban 21 school districts.

Issue Set IV: Long Range Planning

Focus Groups

The focus groups' discussions barely focused on long range planning as a drain on resources. Rather the participants pointed to immediate problems as adversely affecting a district's capacity to develop and carry out long-range plans. In a sense long range planning occurred more when it had to be done—deadline approaching—than as an exercise of governance leadership.

A significant amount of the time spent on this topic was diverted to discussion of the impact of legislation relating to vouchers and charter schools. The escalating drain on resources represented by these alternative educational entities represent a challenge to planning.

Small Groups

The small groups reaction to the prompts on long range planning paralleled that of the focus groups. The participants said that long range planning in urban school districts might be an oxymoron because of continual new and often unexpected mandates. Planning was portrayed as tending to be reactive rather than proactive because changing or additional mandates keep moving the target. The mandated plan of one year is out of compliance the next year because a new twist or a new issue has been mandated and the prior plan no longer fits. The urban districts seem all to frequently to be in the planning year or the first year of a new three to five year plan, rarely getting to the second or third years of the plan. Whatever the plan, participants did agree that data and the improved use of data ought to be the foundation of all planning.

The small groups again brought up the need for the 21 urban districts to work together. They noted that it was critical for the urban districts to maintain unity and work for the common good of all urban children rather than being professionally resentful of each other. The districts should be knowledgeable and supportive of what the others are doing. This common concern should extend beyond face-to-face meetings with each other to any meeting or situation where support could be given.

In terms of the plans that are created, the conferees touched on the need for the plans to have a presence and influence beyond that of their creators. Plans should not be dependent on individuals. They recommended implementation strategies and inclusion of tactics whereby the entire community could develop a sense of ownership of the long range plan.

Kiva

In the Kiva, the comments of the treasurers that related to the issue of long range planning were those that were related to board effectiveness above. The urban school districts need to recognize and act as if they have common problems. The urban districts could have more power if they were united and spoke with one voice.

Board members agreed with that perspective saying that it was extremely important for the urban 21 to work together.

The message from the superintendents was in the same vein. They believe the State has told urban districts they are on their own. That being so, then the urban districts need to get together to have a voice with the legislature.

Issue Set V: E-Governance

Focus Groups

Those in the focus groups believe that boards are using electronic technology in a variety of ways to improve their capacity to carry out governance functions. However, they also are concerned about the so-called digital gap. The ability of families with limited social or economic resources to access modes of electronic communication is a major concern.

Small Groups

Those participating in the conference had less to say about electronic technology perhaps because its implications are still new or unknown to them. They did note, without further explanation, that technology was creating new dilemmas and and requiring new models for leadership. Three major issue areas were identified as needing attention. The areas were curriculum and instruction, governance and management of the school system, and public access to information. The issues were identified and explored.

Kiva

Only in the superintendents turn in the center of the Kiva was e-governance brought up and then only one concept seemed to have common agreement. The districts represented have a variety of approaches to managing their uses and implementation of technology.Beyond the recognition of the differences, there was no significant discussion or exploration of the issue.

Discussion

The findings related to Issue Set I, the recruitment, selection, retention, and evaluation of Ohio urban superintendents of schools and school district treasurers, and the statements and concomitant non-verbal signals with which they were delivered communicated that the governance leaders of Ohio's urban school districts believe they have a more difficult task than

do the other districts in the state. Furthermore, they believe they are not credited or recognized for the successes they have accomplished. This suggests that research ought to be undertaken to find ways to identify and attribute causation for progress made by the students (at the school and/or district levels) rather than just goals attained.

Other findings derived from the first set of issues, notably the frequent change in one or more leadership positions and the suggestions for professional development, suggest that further research should be done to determine if there is a relationship between longevity of governance officials and district effectiveness as expressed by student achievement. If there is and if it appears that such longevity in office is a significant factor in student achievement, it would suggest that alternatives for stabilizing boards, such as mayoral appointment, longer terms in office, and/or elimination of staggered terms, should be moved from being talked about to being implemented. Another aspect meriting research is the training or education given to board members just prior to and during their times on the board. If an untrained board member can adversely affect a board, is there a correlation, causal or otherwise, between a board of well-trained members and student achievement?

In Issue Set II, recruitment, selection, assignment, and evaluation of teachers, principals, and other professionals in urban systems, those participating in this research effort focused most on the pre-service and in-service preparation of teachers to do the work of instruction, particularly in the urban setting. This suggests there might be benefit to research about the preparation required to be a successful teacher in the more difficult urban settings. Are there knowledge bases, skills, and/or attitudes required that are different than those necessary in other settings? If it is demonstrably so, then there might be a basis for differentiated licensing and pay practices related to teaching in the urban districts.

The findings around Issue Set III, school board effectiveness, suggest several potential characteristics that might distinguish more effective from less effective boards. Trust and the related opposing emotion of fear is an intriguing pair. Just what do trusting board members, superintendents, or treasurers fear? What about the distrustful governance officials? A second characteristic revolves around the efforts of the board to educate and improve themselves as individuals and as a board. What are those efforts and what are indicators of success? Are there differences in the self-improvement efforts of more and less effective boards? A third characteristic to be considered is the focus of board activities as a board. In other words how much direct attention is given to student achievement in board meetings, policy discussions, and/or the private communications among individual board members or between the superintendent and the board members or between the treasurer and the board members, and so forth? Another characteristic, suggested both by the findings and by the pattern of attendance at the conference, is the level of engagement and cooperation with similar districts in the state. A board member commented during the Kiva to the effect that you tend to think you're doing something wrong when you are on an urban board until you participate in a conference like this one and discover social problems are common to urban districts. This raises the question about the effects of isolation and interaction with similar people in similar roles from similar districts on the effectiveness of an urban school district.

There were, in essence, two findings related to Issue Set IV, long range planning. One was that long range planning was difficult if not impossible due to ever changing mandates and the press of immediate demands and crises. The other was noting that the urban district all had the same problems and would do well to work together. These finding suggest several avenues that would benefit from inquiry. One is centered on

- What is the role of long range planning in the urban districts? Is it only or primarily window-dressing as suggested by Bolman and Deal serving to project an image of well-managed state/district (1997, p. 242)? Or has district level long range planning actually been a contributing factor toward the improvement of the district? If so, what aspects have contributed to what improvements? In brief, what has been the impact of long range planning demands on the urban districts?
- What are the resources, particularly of money and time of senior staff and board members, tied up with and to long range planning? If there are multiple demands for different long-range plans such as for facilities and for academic, how does that impact the resources dedicated to the planning efforts?
- Covey suggests a four-celled matrix for considering the use of time. The four cells of the matrix are I. urgent and important; II. not urgent and important; III. urgent and not important; and IV. not urgent and not important (1994, pp36-40). Long range planning belongs in quadrant II, not urgent and important; and, of course, things that are in quadrant I, urgent and important, ought not be ignored. The question is are urban districts so overwhelmed by quadrant I requirements that they cannot effectively engage in the quadrant II activity of long range planning? Or is there bleed over from quadrant III, urgent and not important, taking up resources that could be dedicated to effective long range planning?
- What is the shelf life of a long range planning demand from the State; that is, how long before one demand is replaced with a new demand with some significant difference in focus or methodology?

Issue Set V, technology, e-government, and institutional oversight seemed to cause the most uncertainty among the conference participants. Love put forth three stages in the technological development of a school district (2001, p. 249). Considering the relative lack of comfort in dealing with specifics of e-governance, it may be that an inquiry into the stages of development of the urban districts is the first, needed probe. It may be that the probe would benefit from considering the technology stages separately for the instructional side, the management side, and the public access to information side.

As evidenced by the comments and findings from the focus groups, the conference's small groups, and the Kiva exercise, the urban districts who examined these five issue sets found they had much in common and expressed the belief that they would benefit from united, or at least mutually supporting, actions.

Observations

The several months of work on this governance of learning project have produced a series of observations that may be useful in considering the work that remains to be done on the relationship between learning and the governance of a school district. First, it is very, very difficult to maintain a consistent focus on learning. Participants and facilitators found it much less difficult to talk about many factors other than governance, they believed contribute to learning rather than to maintain focus on governance-learning relationship or interaction.

Second, it is difficult to obtain the interest and investments of foundations in the study of governance of education in general, and in the governance of urban learning in particular. Yet, there is interest among urban superintendents, treasurers, and board members in continuing a concentration on the governing of urban learning including the creation of some sort of alliance, compact, or consortium of urban districts to pursue that objective. That interest though is

bounded by the enduring dilemma of where to spend the very limited resources of time and attention.

Bringing together professionals from higher education and professionals from the field to prepare discussion papers on governance issues produced an impressive blend of the wisdom of practice and the findings of research. At times the practitioners challenged the university professionals with the reality of their daily work and, conversely, at times the university personnel challenged the size and shape of the "box" of the practitioners' mental models of their work. Both benefited from the developmental discussions around the shaping of the papers.

The e-prefix when applied to governance remains relatively obscure but is viewed hopefully as holding promise to become an incredible, enabling factor in the governance and management of urban learning in the immediate and distant future.

Another observations is that complexity abounds. Governance in urban education is becoming more complex rather than less. This allows people to be distracted from the core work of a school district, student learning. The increasing complexity challenges and diverts attention away from the interactions that governance leaders need to have among themselves and with their communities. It makes attractive the provision and reception of pre-digested data rather than bringing data to the public forum for critical analysis by the governance agents themselves.

Our final note is one of optimism. Thorough out the work of this project we were encouraged both verbally and by the good wishes and cooperation shown by the busy people who chose to participate. All were people of good will with an open, abundant desire to do better not only by the children for whom they were responsible but also for all the children served by the urban districts of Ohio.

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Appendix A

CONFERENCE ON URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT GOVERNANCE
SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Issue Cluster One: Superintendent and Treasurer

1. How do superintendents and treasurers impact student achievement?
2. What are characteristics of the board-superintendent-treasurer relationships when they have positive impact on student achievement?
3. What does it take for a community to sustain a person as the Superintendent, as the Treasurer, or as a board member?
4. How can we develop a pool of people who have a PASSION to be urban superintendents or treasurers?
5. What does it take to have a relationship that is strong and supportive of improving student achievement among the superintendent, treasurer, and the board?
6. How might accountability information about board, superintendent, and treasurer interactions be effectively communicated to the public?

Issue Cluster Two: Professional Staff

1. How do principals impact student achievement?
2. How do teachers improve their impact on student achievement?
3. What are characteristics of the principal, teachers, and staff relationships when they have positive impact on student achievement?
4. What does it take for a community to sustain a person as a principal and/or as a teacher?
5. How can we develop a pool of people who have a PASSION to be urban principals?
6. What does it take to have a relationship that is strong and supportive of improving student achievement between the central office governance of a district and the building level educators?
7. How might accountability information about the professional staff be effectively communicated to the public?

Issue Cluster Three: School Board Effectiveness

1. What is the appropriate role for boards and board members to play as regards the improvement of student learning?
2. How does the work of the Board relate to student achievement?

3. How has the culture of "deconstruction" affected the effectiveness of boards?
4. How can boards improve the way they do their work?
5. What are board members afraid of? What are superintendents and/or treasurers afraid of about boards?
6. How might accountability information about board effectiveness be successfully communicated to the public?

Issue Cluster Four: Long Range Planning

1. What long-range planning initiatives are currently underway in your district?
2. What changes in student achievement would you attribute to your district's long range planning efforts?
3. What kinds of information about student achievement do you use in creating, modifying, and monitoring your district's long-range plans?
4. How have recent state and federal mandates for planning (e.g., Continuous Improvement Plan, Facilities, "No Child Left Behind" legislation) affected your district's governance practices?
5. What provisions does your district make toward ensuring that the planning heritage of one generation is passed on to the next, for example, to new board members, new superintendents, and/or treasurers?
6. How might accountability information about district planning, especially long-range planning, be effectively communicated to the public?

Issue Cluster Five: E-Governance

1. What contributions to governance are being made by electronic technology in your district? How do those contributions affect student achievement?
2. What contributions to governance could and/or should be made by electronic technology? How are those contributions likely to affect student achievement?
3. What information do you receive electronically? What information should be available to you electronically?
4. What information can the public acquire electronically? What information should be available to the public electronically? To parents?
5. What policies are needed to govern the use of electronic technology in your district?
6. How might accountability information about electronic governance issues be effectively communicated to the public?

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